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United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East

Security Council
Seventieth year

Identical letters dated 5 August 2015 from the Permanent Observer of the State of Palestine to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General, the President of the General Assembly and the President of the Security Council

I write to draw the urgent attention of the international community to the serious financial crisis being experienced by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA)and to echo the appeals made by the Commissioner-General of the Agency, Pierre Krähenbühl, in his special report of 3 August 2015 and at the extraordinary session of the Advisory Commission of UNRWA on 26 July 2015, as well as the appeals by the Secretary-General and the President of the General Assembly for the provision of immediate support and adequate resources to overcome this crisis and preserve the Agency's core services and programmes, on which the Palestine refugees,, including the 500,000 children who attend UNRWA schools, are reliant.

At the same time that the Palestine refugees, comprising more than 5 million persons, representing the largest and most protracted refugee crisis in the world, are facing one of the most severe crises since *Al Nakba* of 1948, a crisis many have deemed to be existential, UNRWA is also facing an unprecedented crisis that is undermining its ability to uphold its mandate in accordance with the relevant General Assembly resolutions, starting from its establishment by resolution 302 (IV) of 8 December 1949 until the present, with the most recent resolutions having been adopted by the General Assembly at its sixty-ninth session. The current financial shortfall in the UNRWA core budget, which exceeds $100 million, and the chronic structural underfunding endured for decades by the Agency, are seriously threatening the viability, continuity and quality of its vital education, health, relief and social services in all of its fields of operation, namely in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, as well as its emergency assistance capacity during periods of crisis.

In this regard, we underscore the longstanding and significant contribution of UNRWA services with regard to the humanitarian subsistence, human development

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and protection of the Palestine refugees, which have alleviated the hardships of their plight and provided them with opportunities for learning and development and the chance to lead healthy and stable lives, pending the achievement of a just solution on the basis of resolution 194 (III). UNRWA has also contributed significantly to regional stability for more than six decades, including during recurrent periods of crisis and upheaval in the Middle East, a fact fully recognized by the General Assembly.

These facts also compel us to underscore the far-reaching negative implications of a failure to immediately and sufficiently address UNRWA's financial crisis and to duly alert the international community. The numerous negative consequences of a suspension of any of the core services and programmes operated by the Agency include severe humanitarian, political, security, economic and social consequences, as well as psychosocial consequences, for the Palestine refugee community. In addition, the negative implications for the host countries, as well as for the region, which is experiencing dramatic instability as a result of ongoing, unresolved conflicts and crises and rising extremism, cannot be ignored.

In this regard, as indicated in the report of the Commissioner-General, in the event that the financial deficit should remain unfulfilled, the consequent suspension of the UNRWA education programme will affect the functioning of: nearly 700 schools throughout the areas of operation, thus denying education to a half million girls and boys, denying them the community, protection, development and dignity that schooling guarantees them and exposing them to further risk; the functioning of the eight vocational centres that provide training for approximately 7,000 youth, opportunities for them to obtain their livelihoods thereafter; and the 22,000 staff members, including teachers, administrators and other school workers, who will not be paid their salaries during the suspension, including the families they support and their wider communities during this already unstable and highly uncertain period, deepening their concern and their anxiety that they are being abandoned by the international community. It will also seriously affect all the host countries, which will be faced with rising discontent and frustration and additional needs on the part of the Palestine refugee community, in addition to the many responsibilities and the weight they already bear in this regard.

Urgent action is therefore required to address the Agency's current funding crisis and to avert such negative consequences, which would further intensify the hardships and the human suffering that is already being endured by the Palestine refugees. We urge Member States to respond to the Agency's appeals and the rising needs and requirements of the refugees in the context of the extremely unstable and deteriorating humanitarian and security situation on the ground in all fields of operation, especially in the Gaza Strip following the Israeli military aggression of July and August 2014 and the eight-year Israeli blockade, and in Syria, as a result of the ongoing conflict there, which has impacted the refugee communities in Jordan and Lebanon. It is imperative also to note that the Agency's expenses have risen further in recent years due to United Nations system-wide requirements and reform demands that have affected the solvency of the General Fund. We urge the adoption of immediate efforts, in particular to remedy the $100 million deficit and ensure the continuity of the education programme, which comprises over 60 per cent of the Agency's core budget, allowing the 2015-2016 school year for Palestine refugee children to begin on time along with all the schools in the host countries.

We recall in this regard that over 97 per cent of the Agency's income is from voluntary contributions, recognize the longstanding generosity of the major donors over many years and pay tribute in this regard to the members of the Advisory Commission for their consistently strong support for the Agency's important humanitarian mission. We also recall the repeated appeals made by the General Assembly, most recently in its resolutions 69/86 and 69/88 of 5 December 2014, inter alia, urging "all States, the specialized agencies and non-governmental organizations to support the Agency's valuable and necessary work in assisting the Palestine refugees in all fields of operation by providing or increasing their contributions to the Agency in order to address the serious financial constraints and underfunding affecting the Agency's regular budget, noting that financial needs have been exacerbated by conflicts and instability in the recent period and the deteriorating humanitarian situation on the ground", as well as the affirmations of "the necessity for the continuation of the work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and the importance of its unimpeded operation and its provision of services, including emergency assistance, for the well-being, protection and human development of the Palestine refugees and for the stability of the region, pending the just resolution of the question of the Palestine refugees".

We thus reiterate the appeal for funding for the UNRWA General Fund, the core funding mechanism, which covers the costs of its workforce of teachers, doctors, nurses, social workers and other staff who run the primary education, health and relief programmes of the Agency, and to mobilize to ensure that the Agency has the required working capital to uphold its mandate without the constant financial constraints and deficits it has had to contend with, which detract from its vital humanitarian mission in support of the Palestine refugees. At the same time, in light of the prevailing circumstances, we are also compelled to reiterate our call for immediate support for the UNRWA emergency appeals at this most critical time in order to address the urgent humanitarian needs and to prevent further destabilization of the situation in its fields of operation.

We recognize the measures undertaken thus far by UNRWA to address this severe financial crisis, and we welcome the proposals made by the Commissioner-General in his report, including for an "emergency flash appeal" and for measures by the General Assembly to ensure predictable, sustained funding for the human development and protection of Palestine refugees pending a just solution. We respectfully urge Member States to respond to these appeals.

Further in this regard, we must once again underscore the permanent responsibility of the United Nations for the question of Palestine until it is satisfactorily resolved in all its aspects. As stated by the Commissioner-General in the report, this crisis facing UNRWA constitutes a major test of the international community's collective will to find solutions that will allow the Agency to uphold its mandate in support of the Palestine refugees and to continue assisting them and providing them with the hope and dignity that is so central to their resilience. Finding solutions will also be an important reaffirmation of the political commitment of the international community to achieve a just solution to the plight of the Palestine refugees in the context of a peaceful, just settlement to the conflict, in accordance with international law and the relevant United Nations resolutions, that will bring a definitive end to the Israeli occupation and achieve the independence of the State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and the

inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, including the rights to self-determination and return. That solution is long overdue, and more urgent than ever.

I should be grateful if you would arrange to have the present letter distributed as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda item 50, and of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Riyad **Mansour**
Ambassador
Permanent Observer of the State of Palestine
to the United Nations